



Press release

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## **Westfalia Fruit: Building the Orchard of the Future today**

Westfalia Fruit, a renowned multinational supplier of avocados and an array of fresh fruits, unveiled, for the first time in virtual reality, its visionary "Orchard of the Future" at Fruit Attraction 2023 in Madrid. This innovative project, represents a pivotal advancement in avocado cultivation, underpinned by over 40 years of research and a commitment to sustainable practices. Sustainability has been at the heart of Westfalia Fruit's mission from its inception 74 years ago. Dr. Merensky's vision, encapsulated in the motto "To Do Good," serves as the guiding principle for the entire organisation. Today, operating in 17 countries across five continents, Westfalia Fruit remains committed to advancing sustainable agricultural practices. The Orchard of the Future project is the manifestation of this enduring commitment. It encompasses four pivotal focus areas, each with far-reaching implications for the entire avocado industry.

### **Pioneering Research for Sustainable Agriculture**

Westfalia Fruit, a leader in applied research, hosts the largest privately funded subtropical fruit research organization globally. The heart of this effort is the "Orchard of the Future," spanning 13 hectares within the Westfalia Fruit Estate in Tzaneen, South Africa. This orchard serves as a living laboratory, allowing researchers to bridge the gap between laboratory studies and real-world agricultural challenges.

### **Four Key Focus Areas: A Blueprint for Sustainable Farming**

The Orchard of the Future at the Kiaat farm has a clear mandate: to develop and refine sustainable farming practices for the avocado industry, focusing on four critical areas—water usage, environmental management, disease control, and genetic efficiency.

Dr. Zeldá van Rooyen, Research Manager at Westfalia Technological Services, emphasizes the unique strength of Westfalia Fruit. Real scientists are hard at work in 50 hectares of orchards, where nature throws its challenges, providing invaluable real-life experience. The dedication of these experts is complemented by the vast scale of thousands of hectares of commercial orchards.

The Orchards of the Future project at Westfalia Fruit is on a mission to redefine the future of avocado cultivation. This visionary project tackles a broad spectrum of challenges facing modern agriculture, including climate change and resource scarcity. It aspires to lead the avocado industry towards a sustainable and prosperous future.

A defining feature of this project is its commitment to research and experimentation. Westfalia Fruit's Orchards of the Future provide an expansive canvas where various growing conditions and stresses can be meticulously studied. This resource allows researchers to monitor and assess tree responses, ultimately enhancing our understanding of avocado cultivation and optimising various factors.

### **An Evolving Journey**

The Orchards of the Future are not static; it is an evolving project. Agriculture is a dynamic field, and this initiative adapts to meet changing challenges and opportunities. It serves as a dynamic platform for testing emerging technologies and state-of-the-art practices, adhering to the principles of experimentation, demonstration, and eventual commercialisation.



## **Global Significance**

While rooted in South Africa, the Orchards of the Future extend their significance worldwide. Experimentation with these technologies in diverse climatic zones and soil types is vital to ensuring their global applicability.

## **Dusa Rootstock: A Remarkable Success**

Westfalia Fruit's pioneering work is not self-serving; it benefits the entire avocado industry. One standout example of Westfalia Fruit's research is the development of the disease tolerant Dusa rootstock. Three decades ago, avocado orchards faced disease pressures, leading to a patchwork of dying and healthy trees. Today, the industry's success owes much to these disease tolerant rootstocks, a testament to Westfalia Fruit's pioneering research.

## **Advancing Genetic Efficiency**

For nearly 45 years, Westfalia Fruit has been at the forefront of developing avocado cultivars and rootstocks that thrive in their natural environment. The Orchard of the Future complements this work by conducting large-scale trials of new crop materials, monitoring how new cultivars and rootstocks respond to the environment, and testing new planting densities. The success of trials like GEM<sup>®</sup>, a protected cultivar with remarkable fruit quality, promises high-density planting possibilities.

## **A Global Outlook**

Westfalia Fruit's commitment to research and development is unparalleled. With a team of leading industry scientists and agronomists, the company can develop, test, and trial innovative solutions both in the lab and the field. As a global company, Westfalia Fruit shares its learnings across its growing footprint, spanning the Americas, Asia, and Europe.

“Westfalia Fruit's Orchards of the Future initiative exemplifies a commitment to pushing the boundaries of avocado cultivation. Through continuous research, experimentation, and knowledge sharing, this project is poised to revolutionize the industry.” mentioned Dr. Zelda van Rooyen, research manager at Westfalia “It pays homage to the enduring legacy of the company's founders and their dedication to sustainable and innovative avocado farming practices, ensuring a fruitful and prosperous future for all growers.” added Zelda.



Westfalia Fruit: Building the Orchard of the Future today. (Photo: Westfalia Fruit, PR025)



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## About Westfalia Fruit

The multinational Westfalia Fruit Group is a leading supplier of fresh and processed produce to international markets, offering a diverse range of quality fruit and related products via its vertically integrated supply chain. Founded 74 years ago on guiding environmental, social, governance & sustainability principles. These practices, premised on the legacy of Dr Hans Merensky are at the heart of all that is done by the Group – “To Do Good”, – of which continue to underpin our approach today.

Today, operating in 17 countries spread over 5 continents, the Westfalia Fruit Group prides itself on advancing sustainable agricultural practices and being a responsible corporate citizen within the communities in which it operates.

As a frontrunner in the avocado industry, Westfalia grows, sources, ripens, packs, processes, and markets accredited avocados across the globe throughout the year. Value-added products include avocado oil, low-preservative guacamole, frozen avocado, and dried fruit.

Westfalia grows fruit in all major origins in the Americas and Africa and sources from partner orchards, giving the Group the most diverse avocado-growing footprint in the world. Westfalia’s dynamic and integrated supply chain from research to the consumer benefits all stakeholders. The Group’s research division, Westfalia Technological Services, is the world’s largest privately funded subtropical fruit research unit. Its dedicated team of scientists and technicians focus on varietal development, innovation, and environmental matters, and provides a pivotal role in defining the future of the global avocado industry.

A supplier of choice to retail, wholesale, and food-service customers, Westfalia operates sales offices in the UK, Europe, North America, Latin America, southern Africa, and Asia. Fruit is packed in diverse formats and expertly ripened to deliver optimal eating quality. For more information visit [www.westfaliafruit.com](http://www.westfaliafruit.com).

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